



# DESIGNING OUR FUTURE

*A Statewide Plan for Washington Libraries*

Strategic Plan

Washington State Library  
Olympia, WA 98504-2460

August 1997

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A decorative graphic consisting of a cluster of overlapping circles of various sizes, creating a complex, web-like pattern. The circles are light gray and are positioned in the upper right quadrant of the page.

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# Introduction

Like every other organization in the United States today, libraries in Washington State are grappling with a variety of changes which will dramatically affect the way libraries do business through the rest of the 1990's and into the 21st Century.

Technology and telecommunications are most often identified, but other issues such as funding for library collections; staff and facilities; changing demographics of the state; and concerns about basic literacy will impact nearly every library, of every type, in the state.

## **Strategic Plan**

In a rapidly changing environment, the major tool by which organizations can gain and maintain a modicum of control is a current, well thought out strategic plan. A strategic plan identifies the preferred future, naming the critical issues and listing the key steps to achieve that future.

Unlike a comprehensive or traditional long-range plan, a strategic plan is designed to provide maximum flexibility for all who will contribute to its implementation. It allows for change, while remaining focused on the big picture and the few key issues.

Not every significant library service or issue is included in this *Statewide Plan*—only those which are deemed most critical to the future of libraries or which have not yet been addressed.

## **Commission and Advisory Council**

The Washington State Library Commission (WSLC), acting on the recommendation of its advisory group, the Washington State Advisory Council on Libraries (WSACL), initiated the process for developing this *Statewide Plan for Washington Libraries*. It was also determined that the *Statewide Plan* would provide the basis for the Library Services and Technology Act plan for the use of federal funds.

The Commission sought to involve a wide group of library personnel and supporters in order to define what the future of libraries and library services should look like, and what strategies are needed to achieve that future.

## **Support and Collaboration**

Members of both the Washington State Library Commission and the Washington State Advisory Council realize that achieving the future described in this *Statewide Plan* will take the voluntary support and collaboration of all types of libraries and library supporters.

Leadership must come from library associations, consortia and collaborative groups, individual libraries, and others who care about the future of libraries, as well as from the Washington State Library.

# Assumptions

Several assumptions underlie this *Statewide Plan*. They are articulated here as definitions:

- ***Customer.....***

The term “customer” is widely used today in all kinds of public and private organizations. Its heightened viability in public organizations is due to the focus on quality and process improvement in which the definition of a user of a service organization is “anyone whose custom it is to receive a product or service from the organization.” Therefore, in this *Statewide Plan* the word “customer” replaces the more traditional terms used by libraries.

- ***Literacy.....***

“Literacy” in this *Statewide Plan* relates to the goal that every individual in Washington State be able to read. Reading forms the basis for analyzing, evaluating and using information, a skill known as “information literacy.”

A number of organizations in a community, including libraries, have a responsibility for increasing both aspects of literacy. This *Statewide Plan* addresses strategies that libraries can take.

- ***Equitable.....***

Given the differences in communities, schools and other organizations of which libraries are an integral part, it

is realistic and desirable to plan for equitable collections, services, and facilities and equitable access to each.

“Equitable” is used in this plan to connote things which are comparable, but not necessarily equal. “Equitable access” implies reasonable access to comparable resources, regardless of culture, language, literacy level, age, ability, economics, or geography.

- ***Universal access.....***

The concept of “universal access” means that if a resident supports a library somewhere in Washington State, that individual should be entitled to comparable, reasonable access to libraries all over the state. This assumes there is a publicly-funded library available to serve each customer, either directly through taxes, through a user fee, or through other means.

“Universal access” as a key concept arose and was widely discussed throughout all stages of this planning process. Although the concept was heartily endorsed as a vision, the details of how to accomplish the vision, including funding, are complex and controversial. It is a concept under construction and requires considerable additional work.

# Vision

## ***The people of Washington will have.....***

- o The opportunity and ability to use library resources in the state regardless of where they as individuals live or work.
- o Improved library and information services through widespread cooperative sharing of resources.
- o Access to ideas and information in a variety of formats, balancing print and electronic resources.
- o The opportunity and ability to seek, analyze, evaluate, and use information they need.
- o Access to information through a physical library and a "virtual" library electronically connected to the universe of information and knowledge.
- o Universal access to global information through the Internet and other electronic resources.
- o Appreciation for the value of libraries, library employees and supporters.
- o Equity of access regardless of culture, language, literacy level, age, ability, economics, and geography.
- o Customer-centered library services, facilities, programs and materials that are responsive to community needs

# Principles

***These commonly-held principles form the basis for shared action to achieve the vision of this plan.....***

- o Sharing of resources among libraries
- o Intellectual freedom
- o Lifelong and independent learning
- o Equitable and universal access to information and service by all customers.
- o Respect for diversity in communities
- o Stewardship of public funds
- o Basic literacy and information literacy as critical life skills in an electronic world
- o Cooperation among libraries and with other organizations
- o Informed citizens as the foundation of a democratic society
- o Services based on the needs of the customer and the community
- o Reading for education, enlightenment and enjoyment

# Goals

**To achieve the vision of this *Statewide Plan for Washington Libraries*, the library community must address the following strategic issues.**

**The Washington library community will:**

- Meet customers' needs and continuously improve customer services.
- Improve their customers' access to library service and resources.
- Pursue technical solutions to service challenges through a combination of statewide leadership and local efforts, as appropriate.
- Use coalitions to develop new services, coordinate existing services and share resources.
- Strive for a balance between statewide leadership and local initiative appropriate to each issue. For some issues, local leadership and solutions are appropriate; for others, statewide; for still others, leadership may be shared.
- Inspire a passionate interest and support for libraries.



# Strategic Issues

## **QUALITY SERVICE TO CUSTOMERS**

**The Washington library community will meet customers' needs and continuously improve customer services.**

To accomplish this the library community will:

- ☐ Take customers' needs and priorities into consideration when developing and improving services, facilities, collections and programs.
- ☐ Develop methodologies to measure responsiveness to customer needs.
- ☐ Develop and maintain effective communication with customers.
- ☐ Seek cost-effective alternatives to retain or improve service effectiveness and efficiency.
- ☐ Serve as "information navigators," adding value to information resources so that customers' use of the resources is satisfying and successful.
- ☐ Ensure that library staff and trustees are trained to provide continuously improving quality service.

## **ACCESS**

**The Washington library community will improve their customers' access to library service and resources.**

To accomplish this the library community will:

- ☐ Assist customers in developing skills for lifelong learning including basic literacy and information literacy.
- ☐ Develop and expand access where it is constrained by culture, language, literacy level, age, abilities, economics and geography.
- ☐ Develop strategies to identify and address the needs of the underserved.
- ☐ Ensure that all people in Washington have access to local and global information.
- ☐ Develop strategies to address disparities in resources.

## **TECHNOLOGY AND TELECOMMUNICATIONS**

**The Washington library  
community will pursue  
technical solutions to  
service challenges  
through a combination  
of statewide leadership  
and local efforts,  
as appropriate.**

To accomplish this the  
library community will:

- ☐ Coordinate statewide database licensing, collections development, and information sharing on successful local technology efforts.
- ☐ Collaborate to develop approaches to finance the opportunities for universal access, including partnerships with the private sector.
- ☐ Pursue funding from every possible source, including the private sector, foundations and telecommunication industries to take advantage of technology.
- ☐ Facilitate libraries' access to technical training and support.
- ☐ Ensure that libraries are knowledgeable about and able to secure discounts to telecommunications tariffs, under the Telecommunications Act of 1996, and other opportunities.

## **COLLABORATION**

**The Washington library  
community will use  
coalitions to develop  
new services,  
coordinate existing  
services and share  
resources.**

To accomplish this the  
library community will:

- ☐ Identify the common missions, goals, issues, or needs for which collaborative solutions are appropriate.
- ☐ Ensure that collaborative solutions benefit participating organizations and their customers.
- ☐ Convert barriers into challenges to be overcome.
- ☐ Encourage collaborative projects as a means to add value to library collections, facilities, programs, and services.
- ☐ Minimize jurisdictional boundaries that pose barriers to equitable access.
- ☐ Identify and pursue strategies that leverage buying power.

## LEADERSHIP

**The Washington library community will strive for a balance between statewide leadership and local initiative appropriate to each issue. For some issues, local leadership and solutions are appropriate; for others, statewide; for still others leadership may be shared.**

To accomplish this the library community will:

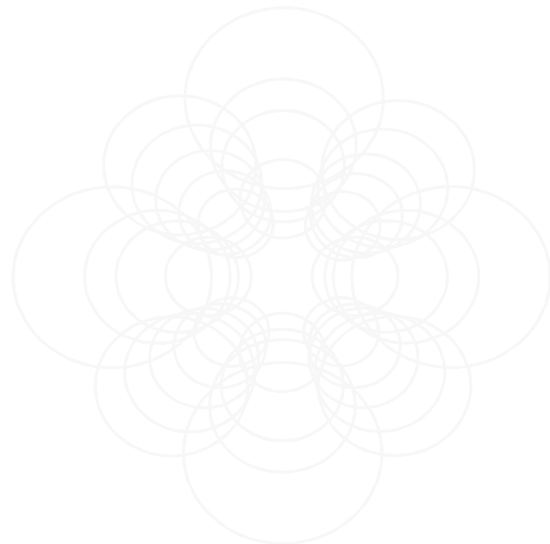
- ☐ Employ leadership strategies appropriate to the issue.
- ☐ Ensure there is ongoing training and development of library leaders.
- ☐ Provide input to local, state and national groups on issues which affect the libraries of Washington.
- ☐ Seek state funding for special projects with statewide impact.
- ☐ Seek a balance between the funding of local initiatives and of statewide programs.
- ☐ Actively work to ensure that every type of library has strong leadership and advocacy at the state and national levels.

## BUILDING SUPPORT FOR LIBRARIES

**The Washington library community will inspire a passionate interest and support for libraries.**

To accomplish this the library community will:

- ☐ Meet and exceed customer expectations for service.
- ☐ Incorporate appropriate marketing strategies as libraries position their services within their communities.
- ☐ Develop and strengthen advocacy groups for all libraries.



# Development of Statewide Plan

In March, 1996, the Washington State Advisory Council on Libraries recommended to the Washington State Library Commission that they jointly develop a long-range statewide plan for libraries based on the recommendations from the 1991 Washington State Governor's Conference on Library and Information Services.

The statewide plan would provide the basis from which the details of the Library Services and Technology Act (LSTA) plan could be extracted and sent to The Institute of Museum and Library Services for the use of federal funds. At the same time, a statewide plan would provide a mutually agreed upon, comprehensive plan for future development of libraries in Washington, irrespective of the federally funded programs and projects.

Over the next nine months, the two groups brainstormed ideas and refined them into a draft plan, a "framework document."

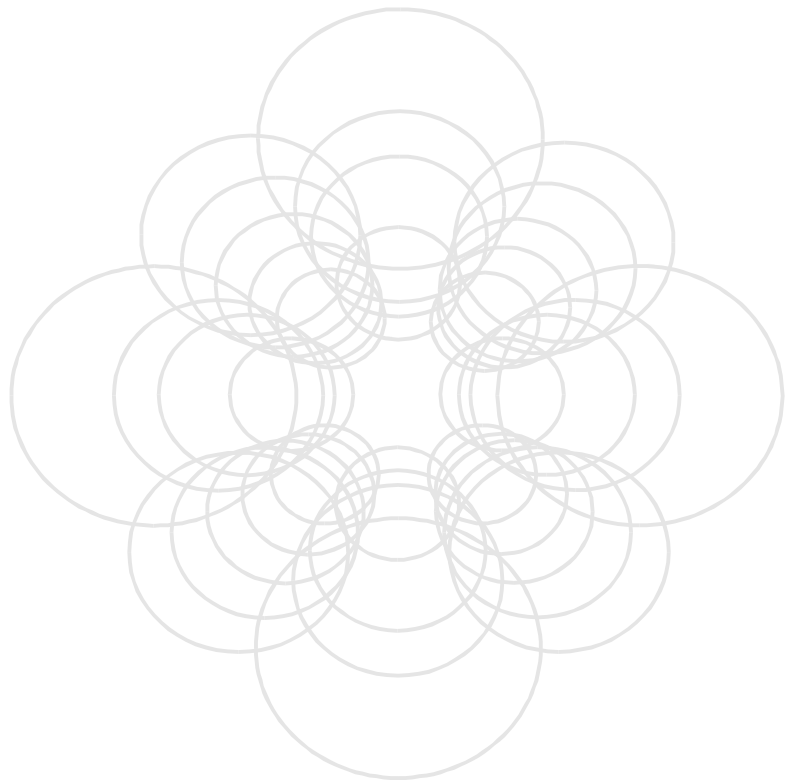
In January, 1997, the State Library Commission expanded the process to gather input from a wider variety of library personnel and supporters around the state.

The Washington State Library engaged Elizabeth Magoon and Associates to conduct and facilitate regional forums to solicit input and ideas. The forums took place in Spring, 1997 in seven locations.

Notes from the forums were analyzed to identify ideas and themes common among the groups. A small "writing group" consisting of an Advisory Council member, a Commission member, and several State Library staff, assisted by the facilitator, organized the next draft of the *Statewide Plan* which was mailed in early June to all forum participants as well as the larger library community.

In mid-June a video conference was held in seven sites for the library community to review and comment on the draft *Statewide Plan*, to develop ideas about how the strategies could be implemented, and to suggest which groups should take the lead in implementation. Using the comments presented by the video conference participants, the "writing group" revised the draft *Statewide Plan* again. The next version of the draft was distributed to the library community in late June for additional reactions. In early July, the "writing group" incorporated the third round of comments into the final *Statewide Plan for Washington Libraries*.

The *Statewide Plan for Washington Libraries* and the *LSTA Five Year Plan* were adopted by the Washington State Library Commission on July 18, 1997.



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An electronic version of the plan is posted at <http://www.wa.gov/wsl>

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